

Sutton House Newsletter

February 2003

For all interested in the past, present and future of Sutton House, Hackney

Reflections on the Lea



The Lea is Hackney's river. It has a fascinating history, a fact celebrated by several events in March at Sutton House. At the end of the last ice age, 10,000 years ago, it was a mile wide in places swollen by the melt waters of glaciers. Around 1,500 years ago it formed the boundary between the Middle Saxons and the East Saxons hence Middlesex and Essex. Vikings later sailed up the Lea in longboats pursued by King Alfred. In the 1760s it was partially canalized to create an important navigational route for horse-drawn barges. In the 1960s a twenty-mile stretch was declared a Regional Park. Whether you call it the Lee or the Lea (the Ordnance Survey gives both) it is a very important recreational and wildlife resource for the people of Hackney and other east London boroughs.

The Silvery Stream: Sunday 9th March

Take a stroll along the banks of Hackney's River Lea with local historian Mike Gray. Finishes at Sutton House for tea and cake. Bring binoculars if you can — herons, wild duck and possibly kingfishers will be encountered. Stout shoes will be needed.

Meet outside Leyton Tube Station at 12.30pm. Walk will take approximately 2½ hours. Tickets £9. Tickets from the National Trust Box Office (01494-755 572). Please quote code E109. (For the walk alone contact Mike Gray on 020-8525 9672: £5.00 (adults), £4.00 (concessions).)

A talk by Laurie Elks (founder of the Lea Valley Association): 7.30pm Thursday 13th March

A personal view on the origins and development of the Regional Park of the Lee Valley

Sutton House Society event. Admission free (to members and non-members). There will be a collection towards the Rev. Bill Hurdman Memorial Fund for Sutton House.

In 1944, Professor Abercrombie in his famous **Greater London Plan** devised the Green Belt to swathe London in countryside and the Lee Valley as a “green lung” — a extensive open space linking the slums of the East End with the open countryside — truly “a Park Fit for Heroes”. Twenty years later, the Civic Trust published a pioneering blueprint for the Lee Valley. Its concept was to create a vast playground where working people — liberated by automation from the toil of long hours — could enjoy a range of amusements and organized sports. The Civic Trust blueprint influenced the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority — which was established in 1967 — to adopt a “bricks and mortar” approach to the development of the valley, which was anathema to Professor Abercrombie's original concept. Laurie Elks discusses how these concepts of leisure influenced the history of the Park; and the efforts of voluntary groups such as the Lee Valley Association to bring about a fundamental rethink about the uses and abuses of the Lee Valley.

Exhibitions

An exhibition of photographs of the Lea riverscape by Chris Mills continues until 24th February in the Café at Sutton House, and until 2nd March a retrospective exhibition by the late John Seabrook in the main gallery includes some works on the river and Hackney landscapes.

Hackney and the Lee Valley Industries: Saturday 15th March

Author of two fascinating books on the Lee Valley, **Jim Lewis** will be talking about Hackney's contribution to the Lee's industrial heritage. Coffee included. Doors open 10.30am. Talk starts 11.00am. Tickets £5. Price includes coffee on arrival. Tickets from the National Trust Box Office (01494-755 572). Please quote code E111.

Other National Trust Events

Discovery Days: last Sundays of the month

Free activity-packed days, each with a different theme, for all ages. Escape into real history for a day! Listen to stories and music, play games and make things, with real characters from our past. Come on a journey of discovery. Come and be amazed.

Mothering Fun Day: 11.30am–5.30pm Sunday 30th March

A magical day out for mothers and families where fun and games can be enjoyed by all.

Sutton House free guided tours: Sunday 2nd March

These informative events bring to life the architectural changes at Sutton House, exploring the stories of the many different occupants, their social aspirations and the changing face of Hackney. Tours start at 2pm and 4pm (duration about 1 hour). Admission: free after entry to house.

Report from the Chair of the Sutton House Society AGM 21st November 2002

At the last AGM of the Sutton House Society (22nd November 2001) I found myself in the sad position of having to report that the Society had been somewhat at odds with the National Trust for the first time since our original campaign in 1986 to dissuade the Trust from selling a lease on the house and allowing it to be turned into private flats and maisonettes for sale. During 2001 most members of our Society were concerned at plans to close the café in its existing form and to limit evening openings for social and community functions. This year I am pleased to say that there has been a progressive and welcome restoration of the former good relations between the Society and the Trust.

At that AGM seven resolutions were agreed and the main body of this statement consists of a report on how successfully we have responded to these resolutions.

1. The Society reaffirms its participation in the Local Advisory Committee, to which it nominates 50% of the members, and seeks to see that Committee taking a more active and valued role.

Partly as a result of the consultation process by Renaisi, involving our members, it has been agreed by management that some form of advisory committee will be reconstituted. The composition of that committee is yet to be decided.

2. The Society will support both collectively and individually the forthcoming consultation process as outlined by the Property Manager in the November 2001 edition of the Newsletter.

Many members have attended workshop meetings or taken part in one-to-one consultations with Renaisi to discuss further the future strategic direction for Sutton House. The final report is awaited imminently.

3. The committee of the Sutton House Society will seek to co-opt a senior member of Sutton House staff to improve communication between the Society and the National Trust.

Siân Harrington became Property Manager at Sutton House in April and she agreed to be co-opted onto the committee. She has attended every meeting since and is making a valuable contribution to our plans and discussions.

4. The Society will continue to have a fundraising role in support of Sutton House and early discussions will be sought with the National Trust to establish a worthwhile project for our accumulated funds.

Discussions have taken place with Siân to establish a suitable object for our accumulated funds. Some proposals will be made at this AGM.

5. The Society will actively seek to increase its membership, for example, by recruiting from the Sutton House team of volunteers who are not already members of the Society.

Our membership Secretary Peter Mudge sent out the following letter to SH Volunteers in February 2002.

TO: ALL NATIONAL TRUST VOLUNTEERS AT SUTTON HOUSE (extract)

The Sutton House Society was founded in 1988 to ensure that Sutton House would be open to the public.

Since that time, the House has flourished and become a valuable asset to the local community, with its wide range of activities, events and facilities. But the original purpose of the Sutton House Society has not gone away: we still need to remain visible as a group of local (and not so local) people interested and concerned in the well-being and future development of the House. For this reason the Society is constantly seeking to increase its membership. The more members we have, the more effective we can be in ensuring that our vision for the future of the House is fulfilled.

The National Trust Volunteers at Sutton House devote large amounts of time and energy to the House, so they must surely share many of the Society's aims. They also have a unique insight into many aspects of the House. Several are already members of the Society but have you considered joining? By doing so, you could make a valuable contribution to the Society's aims. You would also have the opportunity to come on outings and attend lectures and social events, all organized by the Society for its members.

We are pleased to report that there was a good response and membership of the Society is now at its highest level since 1997 with 160 members.

6. The Society will aim to extend its programme of social events and activities for members both within Sutton House and outside.

Six events or outings were organized by the committee during the year. One talk was postponed due to the illness of the speaker.

On 18th May members were welcomed to Kenwood House, Hampstead, (E.H.) by former SH administrative assistant Nicola Richardson. After lunch in the brewhouse and a walk across the Heath we visited Ernö Goldfinger's house at No. 2 Willow Road (N.T.).

On 13th June an audience with Joseph Sickert (son of the artist Walter) had to be postponed through illness. We hope to rearrange it some time next year. [Sadly this will not now be possible, because Joseph has died.]

On 30th June "Back to the Fuschia part 2", a nearly mid-summer party took place in Mike Gray's garden.

On 6th July "A Picnic in the Park" was a highly successful outing in a Hackney Community Transport minibus driven by Peter Mudge. It started with a visit to Lullingstone Roman Villa (E.H.) followed by a picnic in the Deer Park at Knole House, Sevenoaks, (N.T.) in glorious weather and finally a tour of the house itself.

On 24th October the Annual Sutton House Society Lecture was given by Brian Hicks of the De Vere Society with the title "Who was William Shakespeare?"

This evening (21st November) the Annual General Meeting is taking place.

7. The Society will aim to improve the quality and frequency of its newsletter providing up-to-date

information on events in Sutton House and featuring articles on the history of Sutton House and its environs.

Five editions were produced this year in March, April, June, October and November, with one to come in December. Apart from news of the house and information on outings, there were articles on "St. Laurence and the Gridiron", a special edition about the Sadleir family, articles and correspondence on the controversy surrounding the identity of William Shakespeare and an obituary of our former member Canon Bill Hurdman.

Other Matters to Report

Members

Sadly two founder members of the Society passed away this year: Jean Waite former assistant archivist at the Hackney Archives, and Bill Hurdman former Rector of St.-John-at-Hackney and a member of the Sutton House Local Committee for six years.

Three new honorary life members of the Society were enrolled this year namely Viscount and Viscountess Trenchard of Standon Lordship (our founder Sir Ralph Sadleir's later house in Hertfordshire) and Dr. David Starkey, historian and television presenter who gave the first SHS lecture in 1992.

Staff

During the course of the year the Society bade farewell to Teresa Needham and Helen Volhard and welcomed Siân Harrington, Kathleen Patterson and Emily Mealey, as well as Patzy, Sandra and Maria of the Enola Catering Company who have taken on the running of the Café Bar.

Education Programme

The Society was pleased to see this month that Sutton House has been awarded for the second time the Sandford Award, a prestigious award for innovation in the provision of education. A tribute to the current education programme spearheaded by Ruth Clarke and supported by volunteers and Sutton House Society members.

Involvement of Society members in environmental and other local issues

Members of the Society have played an active role in local issues. Lissa Chapman, John Houston, Alan Hayday, Audrey Seabrook, Susan Beringer, Leah Nicholson and Mike Gray are all members of the committee of the Friends of the Churchyard Gardens, helping to campaign for major improvements to the gardens close to Sutton House. Laurie Elks, Patrick Hammell and Mike Gray are on the "Tower" subcommittee of Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, seeking a heritage lottery grant to complete a restoration of St. Augustine's Tower in the churchyard. Carole Mills is on the Board of Trustees for the Ocean Music Venue in Town Hall Square. Julie Lafferty has

been active in the campaign against a high-rise development on the former Latham's timber yard on the banks of the River Lea in Clapton. Mike Gray and Sean Gubbins have organized a regular programme of public guided walks in central Hackney called "Discovering Hackney".

The Monograph

All indications are that English Heritage will publish this long-awaited book on the architectural and social history of Sutton House next year in association with the National Trust. SHS members Victor Belcher and Mike Gray are co-authors (along with Richard Bond and Andy Whittrick of English Heritage) of this

publication. A proof of the dust jacket has been received which must be a good sign! The book will be called *Sutton House, a Tudor Courtier's House in Hackney*.

Sutton House Society on the Web

Peter Mudge has been keeping the SHS web site up to date during 2002. All newsletters are posted on this site and over thirty members receive their information about the Society this way. Just click on <http://welcome.to/SuttonHouse>.

MIKE GRAY 20th November 2002

The Bill Hurdman Memorial Fund

At the January meeting of the new Sutton House Society Committee it was agreed to launch a fund-raising project commemorating the former Rector of St.-John-at-Hackney Church and member of the Sutton House Local Committee. We hope to commission a new work of art for permanent display in the House reflecting current activities in Sutton House. We have had discussions with Martin Shortis, a teacher in fine art at the Prince's Foundation, Shoreditch, who was artist in residence at Sutton House in 1990 and whose fine drawings of the restoration work in progress still decorate the house.

Report from Sutton House Property Manager

Building work at Sutton House

New drainage has been put in to resolve the long-standing damp problems in the Chapel and along the east wall. This seems to be having a positive effect already. The next project will be the redecoration of the east staircase in the spring and summer of 2003.

Table for Old Kitchen

An oak table has been ordered for the Old Kitchen, funded by the Sutton House Society. The table is being made by a very experienced craftsman, and will be a reproduction of a Tudor kitchen table. It will be a very useful addition to the interpretation in the kitchen, as it will be used when we run practical kitchen-based activities for school groups and on Discovery Days.

Conservation statement

A draft conservation statement has been prepared by Richard Griffiths Architects and Alan Baxter Associates. The plan reviews the use of the house and the pressures on it, and makes recommendations for future management of the house. The importance to Sutton House of acquiring the land next door at 16a Sutton Place was reinforced by the study.

Community learning projects

Sutton House is looking forward to working on a number of new projects this year, including an Elders project for local people and *Untold Stories* that focuses on young people. We also hope to continue the projects that proved so successful in 2002, *i.e.* Arts in Trust, Black History Month, Home In and Around, and London Links.

SIÂN HARRINGTON February 2003

From now on the Newsletter will be a joint collaboration between the Society and the National Trust. It will be circulated to all members of the Society, staff at Sutton House and Sutton House Volunteers, and other friends. We welcome contributions from all.

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